

BEST PRACTICES IN
CONSERVATION AND
RESTORATION

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Are you wondering how to tap into the growing pool of knowledge and tools resulting from the more than 200 projects that the coalition has facilitated and funded? Have you generated some great insights or data that you would love to share with others in this region who might find it useful in their work? In this essay, the chair of Chicago Wilderness proposes that the CW Journal can become an ideal mechanism for CW partners to share results and learn from each other as we all work toward the goals of the Biodiversity Recovery Plan.

Fertile Ground

John D. Rogner U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Welcome to the inaugural edition of the *Chicago Wilderness Journal*.

At the launch of Chicago Wilderness eight years ago, we said that one of the fundamental reasons for creating the partnership was to foster region-wide communication and cooperation among the conservation community. We've not done a bad job at that. Some would say that the communication has at times been too much to assimilate, especially in the early years when in-boxes were buried beneath nodding onion letterhead. The paper assault has been turned back in part through web site improvements and the judicious use of other communication filters.

Despite being awash in communication, I will argue that the *CW Journal* is a forum that is long overdue. We share an enormous amount of information, but until now we have lacked an effective way to share our project results, experiences, and lessons learned. Considering the level of activity, innovation, and creativity of our members, the time is ripe for creating a dedicated interdisciplinary project-based communication forum for the region's conservation practitioners. It is clearly essential if we are to take best advantage of our successes.

And our regional conservation successes are legion, beginning with what I'll call the foundation of Chicago Wilderness. The Chicago region historically has been a center of conservation thought and action. Civic leaders at the beginning of the last century insisted that the region's woodlands and prairies were an essential counterpoint to urban life and began to set aside natural land in and around the footprint of the expanding city. This is the land base which we continue to expand and which legitimizes the very concept of Chicago Wilderness. Fundamental concepts of ecology were born on the lakeshore dunes in Indiana. This region nurtured the art and science of prairie restoration at places like Morton Arboretum and Fermi Lab and Somme Prairie Grove.

Hundreds of restorations have happened since, and continue to happen at Bartel Grasslands, Middlefork Savanna, Lockport Prairie, Glacial Park, Illinois Beach, Midewin National Tallgrass Prairie, Nelson Lake Marsh, Markham Prairie – the list could go on for pages. We have developed programs for getting thousands of citizens restoring and monitoring local nature through Mighty Acorns, Volunteer Stewardship Network, and the Habitat Project.

In the urban planning and outreach arena, we are taking our biodiversity conservation messages and tools to government planners and decisionmakers through a green infrastructure project, a native landscaping initiative, model conservation design ordinances, and guidelines for protecting nature in communities. We are exploring approaches for community-based conservation and working to better understand how biodiversity is valued among our diverse human communities. We are now investigating the possibility of seeking Biosphere Reserve designation through UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere program, which would garner the type of international recognition that would elevate local forest preserves to their proper status alongside (and geographically squarely between) tropical rain forests and arctic wilderness.

Under the Chicago Wilderness banner alone, over 200 projects have been completed or are in progress. Does anyone think we have nothing to write about?

A senior manager in my agency recently shared his view of the importance of communicating field office results and accomplishments with the statement that "if you don't report it, it didn't happen." This is the perspective of one whose job is advocating on behalf of my office and my organization. Of course, he knew the work was being done. But he couldn't talk up our accomplishments if he didn't know about them.

This is precisely the point of the *CW Journal*. Your great work will not realize its full potential if you do not share it with others. We will not be able to build on your successes, learn from your mistakes, or avoid reinventing the wheel.

Within the world class institutions of Chicago Wilderness we have top scientists, public policy advocates, educators, communications specialists, and land managers. All are engaged in project work, individually and collaboratively. Some of this work is done under the formal Chicago Wilderness umbrella, but much more is not. Collectively, this represents a huge body of knowledge and experience related to biodiversity conservation. A very small amount of this information is published in professional journals. A bit more goes into contract reports. But most remains undocumented and benefits only the project partners or others who share in it through conversation. The *CW Journal* is designed to get more of this information in print to so that we can more broadly share experiences, convey lessons learned, make recommendations, stimulate thinking, promote more project collaboration, and remain better connected to the larger regional conservation effort.

Projects supported through Chicago Wilderness dedicated funding are perhaps the most obvious first choices for reporting through the journal since they were supported because of their direct benefits to regional biodiversity conservation. Unfortunately, many of these have faded into obscurity since completion. A Chicago Wilderness land manager doing work on lichens and fungi contacted me some time ago to ask if I knew of any work that had been done to catalogue lichen occurrence and distribution in the region. Despite having served on the CW Proposals Committee at the time, I had only a vague recollection of just such a project that was funded in one of the early rounds. Through some sleuthing, eventually I was able to direct him to the project investigator. But clearly we lacked a good mechanism for feeding project results back into the land of the living, and my hope is that the *CW Journal* will become this mechanism.

The journal, however, is intended to go beyond CW-supported projects. It is a means to share the results of all of the important biodiversity conservation work we do, either individually or as collaborations. As such, it hopes to fulfill one of the most important functions for which CW was organized and which CW members have repeatedly re-affirmed as something they most value about the coalition. It is a way to coordinate and communicate the total biodiversity conservation effort in the region so that we work more effectively, efficiently, productively, and harmoniously. It will help us remain connected. I think you will also find that excellent work is sustained by communicating successes.

I look forward to reading about members' experiences and learned lessons. The power of these shared experiences, however modest or seemingly ordinary, should not be underestimated. Somewhere in your experiences will be sparks that ignite major new successes.

In 1991 my office of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) was brand new to the Chicago region. We came to the area with a mission and some resources, and with a few standard program areas, but with wide latitude to develop our own approach to carrying out our mission in a nearly exclusively urban and suburban setting.

While we set up shop we also looked for some projects to launch. Some proved to be false starts. But in the early winter of 1992 I ran across a short article in Restoration and Management Notes, the predecessor of *Ecological Restoration*. In the article (R&MN 9(2):121-122), Steve Packard described an experience where he had hand-pollinated flowers of the eastern prairie fringed orchid. The plants were not being pollinated naturally, presumably because the site did not support the natural hawk moth pollinators. The hand-pollination resulted in good seed set, and he later broadcast the seeds at three Cook County Forest Preserve District sites along the North Branch of the Chicago River.

After five years, several flowering orchid plants appeared at two of the three sites where seeds had been scattered. Meanwhile, the eastern prairie fringed orchid was listed under the federal Endangered Species Act as a threatened species. At the end of the article, he suggested that if restorationists could develop techniques for establishing new or larger populations of this rare orchid, perhaps it could be recovered and removed from the list.

Since a major program area for USFWS is the recovery of listed species, this seemed a promising opportunity for project collaboration. We knew of The Nature Conservancy's Volunteer Stewardship Network and thought that if we brought in some land managers and technical advisors and provided some modest program dollars to coordinate the project, we could enlist volunteers in a systematic program of hand-pollination, seed collection, and seed dispersal at sites throughout northeastern Illinois.

The first couple years were modest indeed, but they served as a "test-drive" for the partnership and the project. Gradually we expanded, adding more sites and more volunteers, and developed standard protocols for pollination, collection and dispersal. We built in a research component with the involvement of Morton Arboretum and Chicago State University (demographics and propagation) and Chicago Botanic Garden (genetics). Our eager volunteers were trained not only to pollinate flowers and disperse seed, but to collect demographic data and plant

tissues, collect information on herbivory, and assess habitat conditions. We coaxed more intensive management of orchid sites from the land managers. The Illinois Department of Natural Resources and Illinois Nature Preserves Commission offered to help expand the project state-wide. We have shared our experiences with colleagues at national workshops and gleaned a bit of national recognition for our efforts.

None of this would matter, of course, if the project had not produced results. The volunteer program is responsible for starting six new populations including successful reintroductions into five historic sites, discovery of unknown populations, and augmentation of existing populations. Habitat conditions have been improved at many of the sites. Our understanding of orchid biology has increased, including the effects of in-breeding and out-breeding and the reproductive costs of flowering. For my agency, the partnership has served as a model for species recovery implementation and has demonstrated how and at what costs recovery might actually be achieved.

All of this because ten years ago someone took the time to publish one of those articles that said, "Here's what I did, here's what happened, and here's what we might think about doing in the future." This sounds a lot like the concept for the *CW Journal* -- a forum for sharing experiences, project results, and recommendations.

This is your journal. It will only succeed and you will only benefit if you read and contribute. So, please, write about your projects and experiences in these pages. Read about those of your colleagues. Share the journal by e-mailing it to your colleagues at your organization and other CW organizations. And I assure you that somewhere in this fertile ground of ideas and experience you will find some seeds that you might grow into new Chicago conservation successes.

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